

"ENCOUNTER"

TV INTERVIEW GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER,
MR. JOHN GORTON, ON CHANNEL 7 NETWORK

Interviewer: Mr. Barry Jones

1 FEBRUARY 1969

The interview opens with Barry Jones' playing back a segment of an interview recorded with Mr. Gorton shortly prior to his selection as Liberal Party Leader. On this old tape, Mr. Gorton comments:

"The candidates in this election are men of ability and integrity and I think anybody could lead Australia with distinction. I just happen to believe convincingly enough that I think that I would like the chance to do it. I suppose because I feel I could do it better."

Mr Gorton's Leadership ✓

Q. Prime Minister, do you think you have done it better?

PM. I think that's a question that should be left to the opinion of the Australian people rather than to myself to answer. I hope by now they will have formed an opinion, and later on they will have an opportunity of expressing their views on the question that you have just asked me.

Q. Do you remember just after President Kennedy came in, one of his first reactions was to say the job was very much harder than he had imagined. He thought in the Eisenhower years it would be a comparatively easy job. When he came in, he found it was terribly difficult. For somebody coming in from seventh in Cabinet ranking into the No. 1 job, what sort of problems did you find?

PM. Well, I suppose the same sort of problems that anybody that ever was in No. 1 job in the Cabinet would find. I never thought the job was going to be easy or was easy, and I doubt whether it ever would be easy because there is a constant string of problems coming up for solution, a constant number of matters on which there are arguments on one side and arguments on another, and on which you have to make a balance between the different arguments and decide. Also, I would add to that there is a much greater sense of responsibility - at least there is in my case - for all the areas of government rather than for concentrating one's attention on the particular portfolio that one had - being interested in the other areas but more interested in one's specific portfolio. Now there is a more widespread feeling of responsibility.

Mr Gorton's leadership ✓

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Q. Coming in from outside, in a sense as a backbencher's candidate against the establishment, you must have been something like an Opposition Leader, coming in with a new slate, but coming in without a mandate of your own.

PM. I don't know. I think I came in with a mandate that was given to me by the members of the Liberal Party who elected their leader.

Q. But it was an inherited mandate.

PM. Oh, I didn't take it that way at all. I took it as a selection by them of somebody they thought would make a good leader and that it was up to me to do what I felt was right and what I hoped would meet with approbation.

Q. You didn't find difficulty in overcoming what is thought of as a notorious resistance within Cabinet and within the Public Service.

PM. No, I think that's been very much overplayed. I don't think it is being played nearly as much now, but it was written up at the start, and I think very very much overplayed. One journalist would write it and then another pick it up, and after a while, it seemed to. . . . remember "Alice in Wonderland" when the Red Queen said, "What I tell you three times is true". Well, it seems to be the idea that "what I write three times is true". I didn't ever discover this great difficulty that was said to be there. I am sure if there was any basis for it then, there is none for it now.

Obviously, the tremendous work that Mr. Hewitt has done would have eased any of the tension in the Prime Minister's Department. But it was certainly understood at the time of Mr. Hewitt's appointment and with Sir John Bunting being put at the head of a separate section, that there was widespread tension and criticism.

PM. You are now not talking about the Cabinet, you are talking about the public service?

Q. I did mention the public service. . . .

PM. Yes, but I was answering you in relation to Cabinet. You are now specifically asking about the public service. I think that has been written up, too, in a way that I think is without proper basis. I have appointed in the course of time quite a number of heads of Departments in the past; Mr. Landau for instance in the Navy Department, (the new Director-General of Works was in line, I didn't actually appoint him, but he was in line for recommendation); Sir Hugh Ennor in Education and Science; Walter Ives has taken over CSIRO - we worked terribly closely together. Of course I had worked with Mr. Hewitt before, mainly when he was Chairman of the Universities Commission but also when he was in the Defence Division of the Treasury. I daresay there might well be some high-ranking public servants who find their advice is now questioned, probed and not

Public Service
Prime Minister's
Dept

necessarily taken, who may at first have thought this was not as good as it had been before, but I don't think that is continuing. Anyway, I think it is a necessary thing to do.

Prime Minister's Conference

Prime Minister, I will take you on to the recent exercise in London when you were one of 29 Prime Ministers at the Conference in London. To what extent was it just an old boys' reunion at which you reminisced about your problems but didn't actually achieve anything tangible?

PM.

Well, it wasn't an old boys' reunion as far as I was concerned. It was the first time I had ever appeared there, and it wasn't an old boys' reunion as far as several other countries were concerned because it was the first time that they had ever appeared. Nor, I think, did it have the flavour of old Carthusians or somebody coming back to discuss their school days or anything of that kind. Indeed, it was obvious as must happen when you have so many different countries, there were many different points of view on almost everything that was put up. What pleased me about it was that these points of view were put moderately - with firmness, with conviction - but moderately, and that having been put by some participant, that participant was then ready to sit and listen to an opposing point of view also being put that way. This, I think, from reports I've heard was a different approach from what had previously occurred at these conferences, and I think a great advance.

But the two outstanding problems don't seem to be any nearer resolution. Now in the case of Nigeria, I understand the Nigerian/Biafran problem was not even raised at all.

Biafra and Nigeria

PM.

The Nigerian/Biafran problem was not raised in the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference proper, it being regarded as an internal matter for Nigeria, the Nigerian Government being recognised as the Government of Nigeria by the United Kingdom, and indeed by ourselves. What was the other problem?

Q.

You didn't feel disposed to raise the Nigerian thing yourself?

PM.

I felt that this was a matter where one could be getting into a situation where you could set a precedent for Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conferences, suggesting actions of some kind or another in what were primarily internal matters.

Q.

This wasn't perhaps because you were anticipating New Guinea being raised on a future occasion?

PM.

No, it wasn't.

Q.

The second problem, of course, was the problem of Rhodesia. Now, Australia lined up with a minority in the straw vote, one understands.....

Rhodesia ✓

PM.

Well, there wasn't a vote, but if you mean that Australia lined up with Great Britain, yes, Australia did. It would have been surprising if it hadn't because before the conference took place, the policy of the Australian Government, clearly expressed, was that we felt that this matter was one for solution between the British Government and the regime in Rhodesia; and if arrangements could be made between the British Government and the regime in Rhodesia, then that was the way in which the problem should be settled. This in fact was the view of Great Britain and this in fact was the view that we supported. We were, of course - we, and the others who supported us - in a minority in expressing that view, but thank goodness these conferences don't depend on votes or majorities or minorities. It was left unequivocally that it is a matter between Great Britain and the regime in Rhodesia, though Great Britain said she would consult the members of the Commonwealth as events progressed.

Q.

In the days before your elevation to the purple, you were always thought of as being a great Rhodesia-liner, a great Rhodesia front man. How did this impression get created?

PM.

I haven't the slightest idea, have you?

Q.

No, I haven't got the faintest idea. By the way, is this the grin that endeared you so much with the African delegates?

PM.

I wouldn't have any idea. Somebody asked me about that when I arrived back in Australia and I pointed out that the African delegates' grins were much much wider than mine and their teeth were much better and they were really rather more attractive.

Racial Prejudice

Q.

Have you ever, even from childhood had any sort of personal reaction to colour yourself?

PM.

No, I don't think I have. Never. You like people. Let me try and expand on that a little bit. From childhood, no I never have. Later on, in later years, it has been a reaction in this way: Some people seem to think you must like somebody an agree with his point of view because he is a different colour from yours. I think that is utterly and stupidly ridiculous. I think it doesn't matter whether they are a different colour from yours. You agree with their point of view if you agree with it. You disagree with it if you disagree with it. You like some people who ^{are} black or brown. You dislike others. You like some people who are white and you dislike others.

Overseas Investment ✓

All right, if we could pass on from this perhaps, Prime Minister, to the concept of the new nationalism that is being talked about a good deal since you have been Prime Minister, this concept that I think you first used on my programme of being Australian to the boot-heels. Except in the case of perhaps the MLC where there is a bit of Australian economic nationalism, there has been little tangible evidence of what you mean by the new nationalism. Now, is the new nationalism just a slogan or does it have a reality to you?

Overseas investment ✓
PM.

It has a reality to me, and it has a reality which can be expressed both tangibly and intangibly. It can be expressed tangibly in the case that you have mentioned, the case of the MLC. Some people think it was wrong. I think it was right to discover who it was that was buying up these shares and to make sure that that company was not taken over. It can have tangible expression in the guidelines spelt out - not in the same detail as they must be spelt out in as soon as possible, but spelt out in my speech at the Australia Club. That is that we don't want good Australian companies taken over and owned by overseas interests. We do want an opportunity to participate in equity capital with developmental projects so that Australians will benefit from the growth of the companies as Australia grows. This is sort of tangible economics.

Gove ✓
Q.

Yes, but in the case of the Gove aluminium project, this may mean an actual diminution of the proportion of the Australian ownership, providing the quantum is greater.....

PM

It doesn't really matter, because in the case of the Gove aluminium project, Australians were offered the chance of a 50 per cent equity in participation. Now this is all one asks, that they be offered the chance. If they turn it down, if the investors in Australia aren't prepared to take that up, then that is their loss. Ultimately it may be Australia's loss, but that is their loss, and it is not sufficient reason for preventing the developmental project going ahead if the opportunity is offered.

Q.

But, of course, there is more than economic nationalism. There is the psychological sort of nationalism. You have declared yourself publicly against Australia as a republic. But is the concept of Queen of Australia - and you said, after all, our allegiance is not to the Queen of England but to the Queen of Australia, is this really meaningful? You mentioned Alice in Wonderland before. Now isn't this a bit of an Alice in Wonderland.....

PM.

Nationalism ✓

No, I don't think so, because in fact that is the legal situation now that the Queen is "divisible", if you are going to call that an Alice in Wonderland concept, but nevertheless, a lot of legal concepts are..... is divisible and is the Queen of Australia. I believe in a constitutional monarchy for Australia, and I believe in our allegiance going to the Queen of our own country, rather than to the Queen considered as the Queen of some other country. Now, you also asked me about psychological nationalism. I want to see grow in the Australian people, and I believe there is growing in the Australian people a primary feeling of being Australian so that they are happy even if they live in Victoria because of the great development going on in Western Australia, so that they are happy even if they live in Western Australia because of the Bass Strait oil discoveries which will benefit Australia. So that they think not primarily of the area of Australia in which they live, but of the nation in which they live and what they can do to benefit the nation as a whole. And what they can do to see that the nation as it grows, as it becomes more powerful takes its full place in the community of nations.

The Queen ✓

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Monarchy ✓

Q.

If you conceded that young people - say people under 40 anyway - that the concept of the Queen of England as the Queen of Australia was an almost meaningless concept, would you concede then that perhaps you may see an Australian republic whether you like it or not in your lifetime?

PM.

I don't believe I will see it in my lifetime. I wouldn't want to see it in my lifetime. I would oppose it because I believe that the constitutional monarchy is a good form of government and perhaps the best form of government that has yet been evolved. The concept of a head of state above and beyond political considerations inside that state to whom all can look.

Q.

But this is true of our Governor-General.

PM.

As the Queen's representative. It is not, I think, as true applied to a representative as it is applied to a monarch itself, and you are asking me about the Queen herself.

Q.

UK - Australia relations ✓

But surely Australia, so far as other nations looking at Australia, Australia would be better served in a sense if Lord Casey could go to bed as Governor-General one night and wake up as President of an Australian republic with yourself as Prime Minister next morning. We would still have the Queen as head of the Commonwealth and we would still have the ex-Governor-General as the symbol?

PM.

Well, I am saying that what I would like to see, and do see and want to continue seeing is not the Queen as the head of the Commonwealth but the Queen as the Queen of Australia.

Q.

Well, can you assert change without at the same time altering already existing UK and US ties?

PM.

Altering already existing UK ties. and US ties. I don't see why they should alter the ties. I don't believe that either the United Kingdom or the United States would take a different attitude towards Australia merely because Australia is becoming more nationally conscious and placing its own interests - or what it sees as its own interests - first amongst the responsibilities of its own government. Clearly, over a comparatively recent span of years changes have taken place. The United Kingdom can have a different foreign policy in regard to certain things than Australia. In the past, it couldn't - in fact it didn't. It was the one foreign policy. It can have different defence policies now. It can have different economic policies now. But we are each seeking the same ultimate goal for mankind and we are each activated by the same traditions of the rule of law and of democracy. And indeed we in our Australian boots and they in their English boots, though there may be by-paths of particular aspects of policy, are marching side by side - not in the same pair of boots - but as partners.

USA - Aust.
Relations ✓

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Q.

Prime Minister, how do you think the United States under President Nixon would react to a shade more independence in Australia's foreign policy?

PM.

I don't believe the United States expects us to follow blindly their foreign policy any more than I hope they expect us to accept without question their economic policy. I see no indication that they would, and I certainly see no reason why we should not - paying regard to our own interests - decide our own policies.

Q.

Prime Minister, I wanted to ask you something about the celebrated Gorton style. Now, how does your style of leading party and government compare with say, that of the Menzies' style?

Gorton Leadership
PM.

PM.

I don't know what my style of leading the party and the government is. I just do what seems normal and natural to do and I don't know how that would compare with other previous leaders and I don't think it is a thing on which one can make comparisons. I would imagine each individual would have his own method, his own natural inclination, his own natural approach, and I would have thought comparisons were unnecessary and not likely to lead to any great benefit.

Q.

Do you think you are a creature of impulse? Do you think you rely on intuition? You are often said to shoot from the hip. Is that a valid charge?

PM.

MA GORTON ✓

Well, I wouldn't myself have thought so. Although sometimes it is a necessary part of a politician's make-up to have some feelings of intuition. But looking back over the past, looking back over the weeks and weeks of negotiations that went into the arrangements which culminated in our entering overseas shipping, looking back over the weeks of negotiations that led to an oil-pricing policy, it would seem to me that if that was to be regarded as shooting from the hip, then somebody that carried on that way in the old West, wouldn't have lasted two seconds, because you had to think it out first.

Q.

It's curious, though, that you should mention the old West. I think one of the most interesting things about you is your degree of enthusiasm for the United States Civil War. How did you become a US Civil War buff?

PM.

Well, because I suppose from sentimentality, and that is certainly all it could be. Certainly not from conviction or from commonsense, one supported the cavaliers in the war, knowing that they should not have won and being glad that they did not.....

Q.

Wrong, but romantic!

PM.

Yes. One supported the Southerners because they couldn't get any munitions or anything in and the Northerners could, and they were outnumbered and they fought on, and it's a terribly good thing they didn't win. Again, kind of romantic. Now, I married a girl who happens to come from Maine, the very northernmost Yankee

State, and she was rather in favour of the Union cause. This led to a lot of good-humoured discussions, and then to the buying of books and then to the buying of more books, and it had this added interest from an historian's point of view - because I am an historian - that in that conflict, for the first time, a cleavage between old methods of making war and new methods occurred. The rifle was brought in instead of the musket; the rifle cannon was brought in instead of the smooth-bore cannon. Even aerial observation was brought in from balloons.

Q. Oh, you had that in Napoleonic times, of course... a bit.

PM. Well, I think you might have a bit. You probably know more than I do, but the Army of the Potomac used this quite a lot. Railways were used much more than ever before to move troops around from point to point. Entrenchments were used. At the beginning of the war, for example, it was felt to be ungentlemanly to crouch behind a tree. You stood up. After a while you dug a hole which was the sensible thing to do. But you asked me why this happened, and this is the sort of evolution of it.

Q. Can't you see a certain irony for a centralist like yourself identifying with the South. It is much easier to see you identifying with Lincoln and Sir Henry Bolte as Jeff Davis.....

PM. I told you it was a romantic attachment and I wasn't necessarily intellectually convinced that the South should win and I think it was a good thing probably that they didn't. No - it was a good thing they didn't!

Alan Reid ✓
Q. Prime Minister, the "Power Struggle", the Alan Reid book. You must have obviously read at least part of it. What impression did you have? Is it substantially accurate as an account of your climb to the top?

PM. Well, some bits of it..... I can only speak about the bits in which I myself figure. There's a whole area in the middle of the book which seems to be devoted to arguments between Mr. McEwen and Mr. McMahon taking place way back in the past before we "ruled off the book". I don't know and I am not interested in them, and whether they are accurately presented or not I don't know. But the parts in which I appear are reasonably, but by no means entirely, accurate.

Q. It is certainly not designed to push your particular barrow?

PM. No, I don't think it is designed to push my barrow or damage me.

Election ✓
Q. In a sense, as the inheritor of somebody else's kingdom, you must be looking forward to an election, because an election can resolve matters. Are you looking forward to the election contest?

PM. Well, the election resolves who is going to be the government - is that what you mean?

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Elections ✓

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Q. Yes, but you have got an inherited government. Clearly, if you had a mandate from the people under your own belt.

PM. As you say, I have an inherited government, but that surely as the record shows doesn't indicate that one is bound down to whatever it was that the previous government was thought to be bound to do. I hadn't heard in previous governments of suggestions for going some of the things that I have suggested to you - of entering a shipping line, of trying to prevent takeovers of good Australian companies, of having a new look at overseas investment policy, of trying to re-examine in depth the health and social services schemes, of removing the fear of long-term illness - these are all things which we have done, not as a matter of inheritance but as a matter of initiative.

Q. Prime Minister, if Mr. McMahon were to appointed Governor of New South Wales, which would be essentially a step outside your control, would you envisage a wholesale reshuffle before the elections?

PM. Well, you are asking such an entirely hypothetical question - I have never heard any suggestion that Mr. McMahon would want or was likely to be, or that anybody had ever thought of him being appointed Governor of New South Wales.

Q. I am sorry. I didn't intend to spring it on you but it is certainly being shouted from the housetops in New South Wales, rightly or wrongly, I don't know.

PM. Is it?

Liberal Party Q. ✓

Q. Do you see much change in your own party since you have been Prime Minister and related to this, do you see the distance - the gap between the Country Party and your own party - as having narrowed in the last twelve months?

PM. I think the gap between the Country Party and our own Party in one sense may have narrowed. In another sense, it didn't need to narrow. We had the same ideological approach as distinct from the Labor Party, which has two ideological approaches fighting inside it. We had the same ideological approach all the time. We were close like that.

Q. All of you? From Sir Wilfrid Kent Hughes right through to Don Chipp?

PM. I think so. I don't see any significant differences in anything but emphasis on some ad hoc decisions - but the same ideological ends, I think, are there. On other matters, we are working very very closely together in the day to day matters. Certainly I believe it would be impossible to find two people working more closely together than John McEwen and myself.

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Labour Party ✓

Q.

As two practical and pragmatic politicians, do you see yourself and Gough Whitlam converging in a sense. Do you think that your emergence as Prime Minister has made any difference in the Labor Party and Mr. Whitlam's role in it?

PM.

Well, I wouldn't know what affected Mr. Whitlam's role in the Labor Party, but I would think it would be things inside the Labor Party rather than things outside which would have an effect on the attitudes which from time to time he might take up.

Mr. Gorton ✓

Q.

Prime Minister..... just as the very last question. Do you have any ambitions as a record-breaker? Would you like to see yourself as a long-term 15- or perhaps 16-year Prime Minister?

PM.

No, I wouldn't. In fifteen years' time, I would be approaching middle age, and I think a shorter period of time than that is quite enough!

Q.

Prime Minister, thanks very much.
